



LAHORE: Sri Lankan player hits a shot during second T20 against Pakistan.



LAHORE: Pakistani cricket team celebrate a wicket during second T20 against Sri Lanka.

Misbah throws weight behind misfiring players

LAHORE: Pakistan head coach-cum-chief selector Misbahul Haq has backed misfiring players to come good in the remaining matches of the Men in Green's ongoing Twenty20 International (T20I) series against Sri Lanka.

While speaking during a press conference at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore, Misbah threw his weight behind Pakistan captain Sarfaraz Ahmed, opener Ahmed Shehzad and middle-order batsmen Umar Akmal and Iftikhar Ahmed.

Comeback stars Akmal fell for a first ball duck while Shehzad managed just four runs. Skipper Sarfaraz accumulated 24 off 30 balls and Iftikhar 25 off 24, while chasing a target of 166 in first T20I on Saturday. However, they batted slowly and the asking rate soared. "Sarfaraz is under pressure but as a coach and management team, I try to support him as much as possible so he plays his natural game and the same goes for the other players," said Misbah. "With regards to

Ahmed Shehzad, with every player I will try to be fair and give proper chances so that they know they have been given adequate opportunities before any decision was taken about them. No matter how much criticism I get, I think you need to give players a proper chance."

"No matter how big a player you are, whenever you make a comeback after a long time out from international cricket, no matter the opposition, there is pressure on you and it takes time to recover from that," he added. He also shed light on the reason behind inclusion of Akmal and Iftikhar in the playing XI.

"Iftikhar Ahmed and Umar Akmal have been brought in the team so that we have some power in the team. When you try out something then you need to have some patience and you shouldn't be so harsh on players, that you give judgement after one innings," he said. "If you look at Akmal's performance, over the last year every-

one was asking why he didn't get a chance because he scored runs in every format in domestic cricket." Despite the criticism Misbah has faced over his selection, the former Pakistan captain is not keen on pressing the panic button after just one defeat. "Pressure doesn't help, in T20Is you need to express yourself. I am remaining positive and I am hopeful that the same goes for the players and we do well in the next match. Whenever you lose as a number one team it hurts and I think everyone felt that, we will try to make sure the outcome is different in remaining matches," he said. "We try to win matches but we shouldn't press the panic button and start ringing the changes. These players can perform for Pakistan going forward and win matches." The remaining two matches will be played on Monday and Wednesday — also in Lahore — with Pakistan needing to win both encounters to claim the T20I series. —**APP**

Akhtar calls Sarfaraz 'confused' captain

LAHORE: Pakistan's former pacer Shoaib Akhtar has called the Men in Green's captain Sarfaraz Ahmed 'confused' for being unable to decide his number in the batting order. While speaking in a Youtube video, Akhtar insisted that Sarfaraz needs to concentrate more on his batting than captaincy. "Sarfaraz as a captain is confused," said Akhtar. "I have been telling him for the past two years to bat higher up the order as Pakistan needs him more as a batsman than as a captain. If Sarfaraz score runs, it would be beneficial for him in the long run as he is facing pressure from other wicketkeepers like Mohammad Rizwan." The wicketkeeper-batsman batted at number five position in the second ODI against Sri Lanka, while he opted to go with number four spot during the third ODI and first T20I. "The decline in Sarfaraz's form is because he has not bat for the past two years, and now he is trying to do so but is unable to score runs," he added. Akhtar believes Pakistan made a mistake by dropping veteran all-rounders Shoaib Malik and Mohammad Hafeez from the ongoing Twenty20 International series against Sri Lanka. "Malik and Hafeez played a major role in taking Pakistan to the number one spot in ICC rankings, so it would have been better if they played in this series," he said. The former pacer also asked the team to be patient with opener Ahmed Shehzad and middle-order batsman Umar Akmal since they are making a comeback. "It is unfair to expect from Ahmed Shehzad and Umar Akmal that they would do wonders straight away, as the returning batsmen are already under pressure," he said. —**The Business Report**

Saadi in the works to train for Madrid event



KARACHI: Pakistan's premier karateka Saadi Abbas plans to undergo at least three weeks training in Spain ahead of the Karate 1 Premier League which will be held in Madrid from November 29 to December 1.

"I am planning to have a tough 20 to 25 days of training camp in Spain ahead of the Madrid event," Saadi told 'The News' from Dubai. Saadi's Olympics ranking is 19. He needs to be among the top five if he is to make it to the next year's Olympics. Saadi plans to take a Turkish coach with him to Spain. "I plan to take a Turk-

ish coach to Spain as it is very important for me," the two-time Commonwealth Karate Championships gold medallist said. After taking part in the Madrid event, Saadi will go directly to Nepal to feature in the 13th South Asian Games to be held in Kathmandu and Pokhara from December 1-10. Saadi is to feature in a number of qualifying rounds. He is being supported by Indus Motor Company (IMC). He also plans to feature in the 33rd National Games to be held in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from October 26 to November 1. —**APP**

Murray climbs over 200 places as Djokovic stays top in ATP rankings

PARIS: Former world number one Andy Murray climbed over 200 places in the new ATP rankings released on Monday while Novak Djokovic extended his lead over Rafael Nadal at the top.

Scotsman Murray, who is on the comeback trail after career-saving hip surgery, reached the quarter-finals of the China Open where he lost to eventual winner Dominic Thiem. The run lifted the 32-year-old 214 places from 503 in the world to 289. He can climb into the top 250 if he beats Juan Ignacio Londero later on Monday in the first round of the Shanghai Masters where Murray is a three-time champion.

Djokovic's win in Tokyo at the weekend means the Serb is at number one for the 271st week of his career, one more than Ivan Lendl and trailing only Roger Federer (310) and Pete Sampras (286).

Djokovic heads to Shanghai as defending champion while Nadal, his closest pursuer

1,140 points behind, has had to pull out with a wrist injury he picked up during last month's Laver Cup. Thiem's victory over Stefanos Tsitsipas in Beijing sees the Austrian close to just 50 points behind the Russian Daniil Medvedev.

ATP Rankings as of Oct 7

1. Novak Djokovic (SRB) 10,365 pts
2. Rafael Nadal (ESP) 9,225
3. Roger Federer (SUI) 7,130
4. Daniil Medvedev (RUS) 4,965
5. Dominic Thiem (AUT) 4,915
6. Alexander Zverev (GER) 4,185
7. Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE) 3,630
8. Kei Nishikori (JPN) 3,040
9. Karen Khachanov (RUS) 2,945
10. Roberto Bautista (ESP) 2,575
11. Gael Monfils (FRA) 2,375
12. Fabio Fognini (ITA) 2,280
13. Matteo Berrettini (ITA) 2,221
14. David Goffin (BEL) 2,190 (+1)
15. Borna Coric (CRO) 2,130 (-1). —**AFP**

The marque of Marquez: Six-time MotoGP champion hailed by greats

BANGKOK: Tributes have poured in to the unstoppable Marc Marquez with the Spaniard hailed as "incredible" and "unbelievable" after he clinched his sixth MotoGP crown and eighth world title overall.

MotoGP rivals, Marquez's own brother and Formula One greats joined a chorus of congratulations for the daring 26-year-old who dived under Fabio Quartararo on the final bend to win the Thailand MotoGP and seal the title in a pulsating last-lap duel. The win gave him an insurmountable lead over closest rival Andrea Dovizioso, who was gracious despite another season in Marquez's shadow. "We can speak and analyse all the things but at the end if you check his score it's something unbelievable," the Ducati rider told MotoGP.com. Marquez has dominated the sport. Since 2013 he has only failed to win the world championship once - in 2015. The 2019 title is his fourth straight and Marquez described this year as his "best" season ever. No one is disputing his assessment. British rider Cal Crutchlow pointed out that Marquez has finished first or second in every race apart from one - the Grand Prix of The Americas when a mechanical problem caused him to crash when leading on the ninth lap in Austin. "He's an incredible talent," said Crutchlow, who is ninth in the standings. "I think he should just retire and give everyone else a chance," he joked. Marquez is from a racing family and his younger brother Alex finished fifth in the Moto2 race in Buriram and is leading the class standings. If there is a sibling rivalry it was hard to see in Alex's endearing tweet about his brother's achievement. —**AFP**



Tennis: Osaka returns to top three after seeing off Barty in Beijing

PARIS: Naomi Osaka's win over world number one Ashleigh Barty in Beijing at the weekend lifted the Japanese player back into the top three in the new WTA rankings released on Monday. It meant back-to-back WTA Tour titles for the 21-year-old, who won the Australian Open in January, but then failed to match those high standards at the next three Grand Slams. French Open winner Barty retains top spot and even extends her lead following the failure of Karolina Pliskova to get past the first round in China. Osaka's rise to three means Elna Svitolina, quarter-finalist in Beijing, slips to four. US Open champion Bianca Andreescu, who lost a thrilling quarter-final to Osaka last week, also climbs a place to number five pushing Simona Halep down to six.

ATP RANKINGS AS OF OCT 7

1. Ashleigh Barty	.....(AUS) 7,096 pts
2. Karolina Pliskova	.....(CZE) 6,015
3. Naomi Osaka	.....(JPN) 5,621 (+1)
4. Elna Svitolina	.....(UKR) 5,525 (-1)
5. Bianca Andreescu	.....(CAN) 5,041 (+1)
6. Simona Halep	.....(ROU) 4,962 (-1)
7. Petra Kvitová	.....(CZE) 4,776
8. Kiki Bertens	.....(NED) 4,495
9. Serena Williams	.....(USA) 3,935
10. Belinda Bencic	.....(SUI) 3,848
11. Johanna Konta	.....(GBR) 3,063
12. Sloane Stephens	.....(USA) 2,818
13. Angelique Kerber	.....(GER) 2,775
14. Madison Keys	.....(USA) 2,767 (+1)
15. Sofia Kenin	.....(USA) 2,615 (+1)
16. Aryna Sabalenka	.....(BLR) 2,580 (-2)
17. Petra Martić	.....(CRO) 2,517
18. Marketa Vondrousova	.....(CZE) 2,390 (+3)
19. Elise Mertens	.....(BEL) 2,290 (+4)
20. Alison Riske	.....(USA) 2,185 (+4). — AFP

Kvitova qualifies for WTA Finals



SHENZHEN: World number seven Petra Kvitová has become the sixth player to qualify for the season-ending WTA Finals in Shenzhen, the WTA said on Monday. The 29-year-old Czech, who won the title on her debut in 2011, will join Ash Barty, Karolina Pliskova, Simona Halep, Bianca Andreescu and Naomi Osaka at the Oct 27-Nov 3 tournament, which offers US\$14 million in prize money. "I'm so happy to qualify," Kvitová, who won titles in Sydney and Stuttgart and finished runner-up at the Australian Open this year, said in a statement. "After a great start to the year in Australia I'm really proud to have secured my spot for the seventh time. This will be the third city I have visited for the WTA Finals so I'm excited to see what's in store in Shenzhen." —**Reuters**

Messi off the mark as two Barcelona players see red in thrashing of Sevilla



MADRID: Ernesto Valverde described Barcelona's victory over Sevilla at Camp Nou as "crucial" and will act as a launchpad to sustain their title defence.

A sublime Luis Suarez overhead kick opened the scoring before Arturo Vidal and Ousmane Dembele gave Barca a 3-0 lead before the break. Lionel Messi scored with a trademark free kick on 78 minutes but the match ended in chaos with Ronald Araujo, making his debut, and Dembele both shown red cards for the home side.

The win saw Barca move up to second in the table two points behind leaders Real Madrid, who visit Camp Nou for the first Clasico of the season in three weeks' time following the international break. Atletico Madrid are third on 15 points after drawing 0-0 at Real Valladolid. "It was crucial for us," Valverde said of the victory. "It has been a strange start to the season and we have not added all the points we would have wanted." Barca rode their luck in the opening exchanges as Sevilla looked menacing and inventive going forward but lacked the killer touch. Julen Lopetegui's side were made to pay for their profligacy as Barca effectively sealed

the match in an eight-minute scoring spree. Suarez gave the champions the lead with an outstanding bicycle kick in the 27th minute and Chile midfielder Vidal connected with an Arthur Melo shot-cum-cross to steer past Tomas Vaclik on 32 minutes. Frenchman Dembele, who started ahead of €120 million (Dh484m) signing Antoine Griezmann, made it 3-0 in the 35th with a superb solo dribble and finish. Captain Messi, whose early season has been hampered by a calf injury, curled over a superb free kick on 78 minutes, the Argentine's first of the campaign.

Uruguayan defender Araujo, on for the injured Jean-Clair Todibo but was sent off 14 minutes later for a last-ditch challenge on Javier Hernandez, while Dembele was dismissed for protesting the decision. Referee Antonio Mateu Lahoz explained in his report that he showed Dembele a straight red card for saying "very bad, you are very bad" and waving his arms at him.

"Dembele's [red card] is a mystery," said Valverde. "It is very difficult to get words out of him in Spanish, so what he said couldn't have been very long." The forward will automatically

miss Barca's next La Liga fixture at Eibar and could see his ban extended to two games, ruling him out of el clasico, if La Liga follow recent precedent of others who have lashed out against referees. Be suspended from Barca's next La Liga game at Eibar and is in danger of missing the 'Clasico' against Real, as players who have said similar words to referees in recent seasons have been handed two-game bans.

Barca's scorer Vidal said they deserved the big victory. "We were superior to them the whole time, we were always putting them under pressure and we are worthy winners," he told reporters. "We were up against a team who are good with the ball and on the wings but we dominated them in those areas." Lopetegui's last visit to the Camp Nou was a painful affair as his then Real Madrid side were hammered 5-1 by Barca in his final game in charge before being sacked, and this was a similarly galling experience for the former Spain coach. "It's a crushing and undeserved defeat," he said Lopetegui. "We played very well, we were brave and we tried to do what we had worked on in training but we couldn't take our chances." —**Reuters**